

Commentary: US media monopoly undermines media influence

By Dai Lina

The US has always presented itself as a model in terms of democracy and freedom of the press. It not only points fingers at other country with different systems, but also interferes in their internal affairs. However, does the so-called freedom of the press really exist in the US? The answer is NO.

Reviewing the development of democracy and the 200-plus-year history of the US, it's easy to see that the evolution the media is indeed a historical outcome which has different missions and connotations in different times. However, the US has simplified the media as its tool and adopted double standards in its practice of international communication, requiring other countries to adhere to absolute freedom of press while maintaining a conditional one itself.

Undoubtedly, the US is one of the most marketized countries with a leading media industry. It has experienced two major media transitions in the recent century: the Communications Act released in 1934 and Telecommunications Act issued in 1996.

The first act laid the foundation for the privatization of the US radio, and the latter offered a relaxed media management by permitting organizations in other industries to merge with media outlets. As a result, money politics has been introduced to the US media industry which was later monopolized.

First of all, the money politics-led monopoly of over the media has further destroyed the country's democratic politics. Privatization, capitalization and marketization have all contributed to the supremacy of money in the media industry, and commercialization and low quality have caused a crisis of public communication. The entertainment programs, which are unconnected with public life, provided by the media numbed the mass audiences, leading to political alienation or political apathy. Consequently, democracy turned into a political game without the engagement of the public.

Secondly, the conspiracy by media elites and politicians has violated democracy's principle of majority rule. Such conspiracy was accomplished under the cover of "neoliberalism" which focuses on privatization, capitalization, marketization, and the weakening of government functions.

The theory advocates a relaxed media monitoring system and allows merger. According to the theory, minor political elites are able to dominate politics and ideology, and represent the will of the atomized society, so the introduction of big public policies needs no public debate. As a result, decisions on public affairs have become a game among a minority of elites.

In addition, given a highly monopolized media industry and declining public communication, the important topics such as "who controls the media" and "whom does the media serve" are not open

for public debate.

As private properties, the media is not able to perform its social function to the fullest. For instance, the U.S. media will never incorporate the huge spending on the presidential election into its public agenda.

It indicates that the so-called freedom of the press of the bourgeoisie is indeed a fraud of ideology which not only legalizes the status quo, but also deceives the public and beclouds the oppressive system. Media is a part of the capitalist political system, thus it barely exposes the matters threatening the capitalist social order.

In a sense, the objectiveness and independence are not only important ideologies of media organizations, but also a pretext for capitalist countries to exercise hegemony.

The U.S. media, in its history, has done a great job in terms of protection of citizens' rights and the battle against political corruption. The public role of the media, for instance, was fully reflected during "muckraking", African-American Civil Rights Movement and the Watergate scandal.

However, corroded by money politics, the US media has turned into an accomplice of political corruption and destroyer of democratic politics.

The capitalist US media system will inevitably cause a decline of the media influence and expose its anti-democracy nature. Meanwhile, the monopoly by some large media outlets will eventually turn people's enduring mistrust into public doubt and protests.

Freedom and responsibility form a paradox. Therefore, responsibility could only be achieved with a certain sacrifice of freedom. The so-called "responsible and freedom" notion is just a vision of the US media industry, and the "freedom of the press" is nothing more than a tool of the country to contain its competitors.

(The author is Vice President of the Journalism Institute of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences)

(Source: People's Daily)